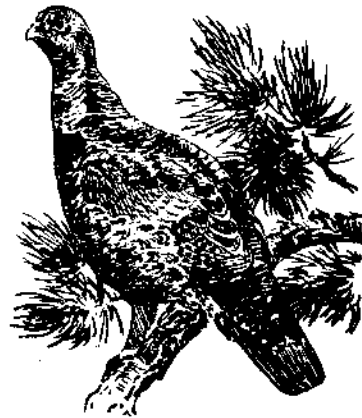


****ATTENTION****

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Habitat management for

**BLUE
GROUSE**

In The State of Washington

The blue grouse, (also called "hooter") *Dendragapus obscurus*, is the largest of the three species of forest grouses in Washington. It is somewhat smaller than a hen pheasant and lacks the long tail. It is found in mountainous areas throughout the State, wherever open coniferous forests are present. Our state is recognized as the best blue grouse state in North America. It is the most popular of our native grouses and provides outstanding recreation to many Washington sportsmen who harvest 70,000 to 90,000 blue grouse annually.

Three subspecies of blue grouse occur in the State. The dark-colored form, west of the Cascades summit, is called Oregon blue or sooty grouse, *D. obscurus fuliginosus*. The two pale-colored forms are: The Sierra blue grouse, *D. obscurus sierrae*, on the eastern slope of the Cascade Mountains in central Washington; and Swarth blue grouse, *D. obscurus pallidus*, that occurs on the eastern slopes of the Cascades in northern Washington and in northeastern and southeastern Washington.

The seasonal movements of blue grouse are quite unusual. A large part of the population descends to the foothills and lower areas in spring to nest and raise their broods. In the fall, beginning about August 1, they start to migrate to the higher mountain slopes where they spend the winter in the shelter of evergreens, living almost entirely on the needles of fir trees, chiefly Douglas-fir.

The nest is made on the ground in a slight depression, lined with grass, leaves, or other dry vegetable matter, and situated in open areas near a meadow, stream, or spring where succulent plant foods are available. The eggs, usually six or seven in number, are laid between late April and early June, and hatch in a little over three weeks. The young are nearly fully-grown by September or October at ages between 12 and 14 weeks. The average brood at maturity is about 3 or 4 young.

HABITAT NEEDS

Plant Foods. Summer, Fall, and Winter foods of the blue grouse include the leaves or needles, flowers, fruits and seeds of a wide variety of plants. The twelve most important are bearberry, bluegrass, clovers, dandelion, Douglas-fir, elderberries, eriogonum (shrubby buckwheat), huckleberry, larch, lettuce (wild), pine, and pussytoes; also currants, mountain-ash, oak, oats, raspberry, serviceberry, snowberry, strawberry, sunflower, and vetch.

Animal foods in summer comprise about ten percent of the diet -- chiefly ants, beetles, and grasshoppers. The chicks' food is 70 to 100 percent insects through the first month, and berries are important from July to September.

Cover. Cover is provided by mixed grass and forbs, shrubs, and trees of open areas. The hen and young feed best in grass-forb areas where the vegetation is 6 to 12 inches high.

Water. Blue grouse depend primarily on vegetation for their water requirements, but they will readily accept free water when it is available.

HABITAT IMPROVEMENT

Deferred or moderate grazing preserves valuable nesting, feeding, and brood cover. Fenced exclosures, particularly around water sources, supply cover, berries, and water.

Reseeding of moist areas on skid trails and roads in logged-over areas, using bluegrass and clover, provides succulent green forage for grouse from April to October.

When developing springs or installing livestock watering troughs in grouse habitat, wildlife watering devices should be included. This provides accessible drinking water and does not subject the birds to the danger of large tanks.